

To Make Matters Worse



Life - a battering ram inflicting trauma on humans"
– Kilroy J. Oldster, Dead Toad Scrolls

The term formative years refer to a period when one discovers and absorbs information from daily existence...some useful, some not. Graham Greene said it best: "*There is always one moment in childhood when the door opens and lets the future in.*"

In the photo above, depicting your writer - somewhere between 2 to 4 years of age, I appear fully engaged - formulating thoughts on a variety of subjects just as the door unexpectedly opens.

(Please note the book in my lap.)

In modern parlance, I was multi-tasking ...reading heady material whilst potty training - something of an autodidact. I'm not certain what I was contemplating in the moments before the bathroom door flew open. That knowledge is lost to the mists.

But the innocent look on my face is a veil barely disguising the immense psychological damage taking place. At the time, I hadn't the words to describe the shredding of my dignity, roiling any decency I might still have had. It was only later that I began a deep dive into the calamitous outcomes triggered by the cruel Kodak moment.

I have no memory of who the photographer was. As the photo shows, I was otherwise occupied. The outrage lasted seconds leaving no time for analysis but the damage has resounded for years.

The *Brownie* camera capturing the horrific scene was the filmic wonder of it's time. In this demeaning instance, the camera was cutting edge photographic technology in the wrong hands. The bakelite device focused mercilessly, savaging my virtue. To mock my shame - the Brownie camera's misguided advertising mockingly boasted:

"Memories made by Kodak."



Now we come to the question - who was behind the camera. What imprudence drove them? What delirium was the photographer suffering?

Step 1, motive! What abomination could I possibly have committed to trigger this crude invasion? **Step 2**: identify the person most likely to have the opportunity. Where to begin? With parents and 3 siblings, the usual suspects were pitiless, plentiful, and oh so very close.



The Investigation

Critical observers - note the Paparazzi sensibility. The picture is sloppily framed indicating the invasive shutterbug was hurried, perhaps a bit ashamed. In spite of the tilted camera angle the intent is clear: create maximum embarrassment to devastating effect.



Next, we must identify the most likely perpetrators. In this instance five suspects are available, each directly related by blood. The five include: my mother, father, my oldest sister, older brother and perhaps even my younger sister.



Normally, I'd give my younger sister a pass as she would have been but a toddler. On the other hand, much later in life she took an abiding interest in photography, so it is difficult to rule her out entirely. Perfidy knows no age limit.



A suspect unable to ignore would be my oldest sister. A first born in any family often feels threatened by the arrival of a new sibling. Her actions and motivations must be meticulously studied.



The final sibling/suspect worthy of scrutiny is my older brother. The murderous biblical story of Cain and Abel points directly to troubled male sibling relationships that routinely run afoul of accepted norms.



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Yet another contender for camera confederate would be my old man. The Oedipal complications found in families might be enough to establish motive. And lest we forget: my dad was in the advertising hustle, a métier distorting reality using crafty images. I know this to be true. I made my career doing the same thing. Dear Old Dad may well have been devious enough to snap the shutter.

And now finally, we must consider the most sacred, the most unimaginable of all ... my mother. Casting unproven aspersion on one's matriarch is blasphemous.



Yet even before the bathroom door flung open, I was aware of her penchant for stirring the pot. She may have been the perpetrator. Her motivations demand painstaking examination.

The Verdict

In the end, it seems we can never know with precision who the culprit was. After protracted questioning, not one of alleged suspects admit their participation in my indignation. Even as I suffered crippling psychological reverberations, cascading down the years, no one would cop to the deed. Not one admitted guilt.

I've given great thought to this matter. I have my suspicions. Several had reason to take the picture, too dangle the ignominy in my face. I shall take my dubiety quietly to the grave. The guilty know who they are.

"Guilt always hurries towards its complement, punishment; only there does its satisfaction lie."

Lawrence Durrell

